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SIMON ZELOTES

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Simon Zelotes or Simon the Cananæan is one of the Twelve of whom it is customary to say that we know nothing except that his name shows that he had once belonged to the Sect of the Zealots or Cananæans, the "physical-force men" of the Jews, and that he had afterwards, seeing the error of his ways, adopted the pacific teachings of Jesus.

It is therefore somewhat of a shock to discover from Josephus that, if his evidence be correct, the use of the name Zealot to describe a Jewish sect or party cannot be earlier than A.D. 66. For this reason it seems opportune to bring together the facts dealing with the Zealots and cognate contemporary movements, and in their light to ask once more what is the meaning of "Simon the Zealot."

The usual assumptions¹ with regard to the Zealots are that they were the followers of Judas the Gaulonite of Gamala, also called Judas of Galilee, who founded in A.D. 6 what Josephus calls the "Fourth Philosophy" of the Jews. This philosophy insisted on the repudiation of any king but God, and in some modern books it is represented as having strong Messianic hopes.² It is also maintained that the Zealots are the same as the Sicarii or at least that the Sicarii are a branch of the

¹ Typical, for instance, is the statement in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, on Zealot: "It is applied distinctively to a sect whose tenets are virtually identical with those of the Assassins, of whom they are indeed the forerunners." It can only be said of such statements that they reflect Schürer, not Josephus.

² It is sometimes held that The Assumption of Moses belongs to this school, but the evidence is slight. Moreover the figure of Taxo is by no means clearly Messianic, even if Burkitt's ingenious suggestion that Taxo(k) is *gematria* for Eleazar, be rejected.

Zealots, and it is often held that there was an almost unbroken succession of leaders of the Zealots, from Hezekiah, who preceded Judas and according to Schürer was his father, down to the fall of Jerusalem.

Hardly any of these assumptions is well-founded. With regard to Judas Josephus³ states that he tried to rebel at the time of the census of Quirinus with the support of a Pharisee named Zadok, after Joazar the son of Boethus, the high priest, had induced the people to submit to the enrolment. It is then that he goes on to say that Judas founded the "Fourth Philosophy," which agreed in all respects with the Pharisees except that it allowed only God to be acknowledged as king and advocated deeds rather than words.

All of this statement is entirely probable in itself. The taxation of Quirinus was a two-fold insult to Jewish prejudice: first, because of the repugnance which was felt to the idea of numbering the people; and secondly, because of the belief that the taxes payable by the Jews in the Holy Land were God's peculiar property. It is therefore quite likely that Judas had Pharisaic support. It is also quite likely that a form of thought was started by him and that it continued down to the fall of Jerusalem. It is even probable that much in the New Testament can best be understood as propaganda against this form of thought. But this does not prove that the Fourth Philosophy was identical either with the Zealots or with the Sicarii, and it certainly does not show that the movement of Judas was Messianic.

The clearest way of establishing the facts is to notice what Josephus really does say about the Zealots and Sicarii.

The Sicarii arose, according to Josephus,⁴ in the time of Felix. They were so called because they mingled in

³ Antiq. XVIII, 1, 6.

⁴ B. J. II, 18.

the crowd on festivals with a knife (*sica*) concealed in their clothes and assassinated their opponents. They killed first Jonathan the High Priest and afterwards so many more that a reign of terror ensued. In the same passage Josephus mentions two other movements, but clearly separates them from that of the Sicarii. The first was that of a band who claimed divine inspiration and led men out into the wilderness, "pretending God would there show them signs of liberty." Felix, however, thought that this was the beginning of a revolt, sent out cavalry against them, and cut them to pieces. Another rising was similarly dealt with by Felix, when an Egyptian false prophet collected 30,000 men, whom he led round from the wilderness to the Mount of Olives. It is very remarkable, especially in view of the well-known problem presented by the incident of Theudas, that in Acts 21 37 these three risings in the time of Felix are combined into a single incident.⁵ Josephus, however, clearly distinguishes them, though he mentions them together.

The later history of the Sicarii is that they formed an organized band which had its headquarters in the fortress of Masada near the Dead Sea under the leadership of Eleazar, a kinsman of Judas. This held out until after the fall of Jerusalem, and was finally taken by Fabius Silva, after the garrison had killed first their wives and children and afterwards themselves. Only two women and five children survived.

Those of the Sicarii who had not been besieged in Masada escaped to Egypt. Some went to Alexandria and tried to renew their opposition to Rome, but they were finally handed over by the Jews to the Romans. Others went to Cyrene; and one of them named Jonathan led out a number of the poorer class into the desert,

⁵ Οὐκ ἄρα σὺ εἶ ὁ Αἰγύπτιος ὁ πρὸ τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀναστατώσας καὶ ἐξαγαγὼν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον τοὺς τετρακισχιλίους ἄνδρας τῶν σικαρίων;

promising them signs and wonders, but the richer Jews informed Catullus the governor, who dispersed Jonathan's followers. He revenged himself by laying information against the richer Jews, and he and Catullus joined in a campaign of blackmail in which Josephus was involved. When, however, the matter came to the emperor, the plot was discovered, Catullus disgraced, and Jonathan burned.⁶

The Sicarii left an interesting trace of their memory in the Mishna⁷ in the law of *Sicaricon*, which was concerned with the settlement of the difficulty caused by property sold by the Sicarii and afterwards claimed by the original owner. It was clearly extended by analogy to other instances of a similar nature, but it is doubtful whether it originally refers to the time of Vespasian or of Hadrian.

The first use of the word "Zealot" in Josephus as the name of a party in Jerusalem is in *Bellum Judaicum* IV, 3, 9. After this he uses it frequently, and always in the same sense. It is the name arrogated to themselves by the followers of the famous John of Gischala, who had escaped with some of his followers when his home, the last place in Galilee to be taken, was captured by Titus. John came to Jerusalem with his followers and started a popular movement against the high-priestly families. He succeeded in procuring the election of an obscure person, named Phanneas, as high priest. It is quite clear from Josephus that the name "Zealot" (for he uses it as a technical designation) applies to John's following and to no other—a party equally opposed to the Sicarii, to the priests, and to yet another of the factions which existed in Jerusalem after 66, namely that of Simon ben Giora, who had once belonged to the Sicarii but had left them because they would not undertake operations

⁶ B. J. VII, 8, 1-10, 1.

⁷ *Gittin* V, 7.

at a distance from Masada. Ultimately he became captain of a large body of men and was welcomed into Jerusalem by the priestly party headed by Matthias in order to combat the Zealots.

It should be added that there is no reason for connecting the Zealots or even the Sicarii with any Messianic movement. It is true, no doubt, that many Jews were expecting the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in a catastrophic form, but this view did not necessarily imply a belief in a Messiah and certainly not a belief in an already present Messiah. The first Jew who is known to have proclaimed himself the Messiah is Bar Cochba (A.D. 135). The belief that a leader was the Messiah must be distinguished from the view that he was an inspired person of supernatural power. Claims of the latter kind were far more frequent. Familiar instances are the Egyptian in the time of Felix,⁸ the Cyrenæan movement of Jonathan,⁹ or the still earlier movement in Samaria suppressed by Pilate¹⁰; but all these instances represent "false prophets" not "false Christs."

It is also desirable to protest that there is no justification at all for connecting either the Zealots or even the "Fourth Philosophy" of Judas with the brigand Hezekiah. This Hezekiah is mentioned in *Bellum Judaicum* I, 10, 4. He is called an ἀρχιληστής and his capture was one of Herod the Great's first exploits. His son, Judas, is mentioned in *Bellum Judaicum* II, 4, 1, as starting an insurrection after the death of Herod. But Josephus clearly distinguishes him from Judas the Gaulonite, for he says that Judas ben Hezekiah aimed at monarchy, while he is explicit in emphasizing that the other Judas refused to recognize any king but God. The founder of the Fourth Philosophy, however regrettable the results

⁸ B. J. II, 13, 5.

⁹ B. J. VII, 11, 1.

¹⁰ Antiq. XVIII, 4, 1.

of his teachings, may have been a fanatic, but was certainly neither a brigand nor an aspirant to a throne. Schürer's statement that Judas ben Hezekiah is the same as Judas of Galilee seems therefore quite indefensible.

Finally, a word must be said about a remarkable statement in the Jewish Encyclopædia, in which the writer on the word "Zealot" assumes that Zealot, or rather Cananæan, was the regular name of an order among the Jews who used physical force. The writer states that Clermont-Ganneau in 1871 discovered an inscription in the Temple, authorizing the Cananæans to kill any foreigners in the sacred parts of the building. All these statements seem to be misleading. The word "Cananæan" in the Talmud is applied generally to those who manifest religious zeal, and there is no more evidence in the Talmud of their existence as an order or sect than there is in Josephus. Moreover, the inscription found by Clermont-Ganneau is in Greek and does not mention the Cananæans at all.¹¹

Why is it that these facts have been so far overlooked that the name of Zealot has been given to the Fourth Philosophy? Partly because the word translated Zealot is not an uncommon one and represents patriotic virtue. It is used, for instance, in 2 Maccabees 4 2 and in Josephus¹² of the patriots in the days of the Maccabees. It is therefore easy to treat the word in the same way as, for instance, *Chasid* has been treated, and to find a reference to the party of the Zealots every time that a man is praised for being zealous. But there is no real suggestion that in any of these passages it is more than an honorable adjective. Far more important is the influence of the name of Simon the Zealot. It is obvious that the view that Simon was called a

¹¹ The part in question is *μηδενα αλλογενη εισπορευεσθαι εντος του περι το ιερον τρυφακτου και περιβολου ος δ' αν ληφθη εαυτω αιτιος εσται δια το εξακολουθειν θανατον*.

¹² *Antiq.* XII, 6, 2.

Zealot because he belonged to the party of John of Gischala is not in accord with the traditional view of the Twelve, and therefore the theory arose that there was a party called Zealots before the last days of Jerusalem, and this was identified with the Fourth Philosophy described by Josephus.

Recognizing the facts as they are, the name of Simon the Zealot offers an interesting problem, which can be solved in more than one way. It is possible that we have all been wrong in translating the Greek of Luke, or explaining the transliterated Aramaic of Matthew, as "Simon the Zealot." Probably it should be "Simon the Zealous"; or in other words that there is no reference at all to any political party but merely to the personal nature of Simon. Another possibility is that the Evangelists made a mistake and really thought that the word which they found in their source referred to the political party of which they had heard, or possibly had read about in the pages of Josephus. A third and more imaginative but less probable hypothesis is that Simon did in point of fact join the party of the Zealots in the last days of Jerusalem.